

# Bard

Bard College  
**Bard Digital Commons**

---

Robert Kelly Manuscripts

Robert Kelly Archive

---

6-2002

junC2002

Robert Kelly  
*Bard College*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts](http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts)

---

## Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "junC2002" (2002). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 953.  
[http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts/953](http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/953)

This Manuscript is brought to you for free and open access by the Robert Kelly Archive at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Robert Kelly Manuscripts by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@bard.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@bard.edu).

# Bard

---

Woke late, already a sailboat  
was through the channel and another  
coming in on the sound

and here I thought it was Monday  
but it's just like Apollinaire  
everybody's on vacation  
except Dufy who is busy  
painting sails flags our eager  
empty sunbronzed faces o girls  
of summer et cetera the blue,  
that's what I'm trying to say, the blue.

10 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

=====

The eleven line stanza, the eight syllable line, and conversely. These are the modes of smiling\* poetry. Anything longer begins to frown. And it's interesting that Dante (3 x 11 ad infinitum) is, in any given tercet, an epigrammatist, a carver of precise observations and sever judgments. Dante's 'epic' (as they wrongly call it -- he called it *comedy* and he was right) or 'lyric' arises from sequencing these solo shots and riffs and jabs -- frames per second -- the *Commedia* our first movie.

---

\* smiling means Mediterranean, California, Delhi in January, New York in April.

WHAT THE POET REALLY WANTED TO WRITE TO ELIZABETH BOYLE AS HIS  
PROTHALAMION TO HER EMBRACE

This stone that means to be my shell  
highland cattle on a distant beach  
elegies from Italy my sun my sun  
the stone moves faster than the shell  
only in dream where Venice rises  
unbearably distinct mosaic far  
everybody needs an Adriatic Sea  
with a Venice at the end of it, no  
moon tonight, the black is at its full  
music but why listen? You enter  
for the first time this dark story  
like the espresso still steaming beside  
the aged mobster shot down in his café  
I pick up and drink a dead man's stimulant  
because it is like you (I said this  
before, is anybody listening?) the luster  
of oil along the coffee surface, the snug  
meniscus where it meets the cup,  
aye, many a dope fiend has gotten lost  
pondering such kitchen demonstrations  
of god's will made known in a matter world  
the ill-grasped laws of physics,  
because you are those laws, don't you see,  
the cynosure (unpleasant etymology  
skip it) all my eyes are trained on you  
I'm like a fly where you're concerned  
I see your past and future, pester you  
till your assent to my rare silence  
lets you move into my house, drunken

threshold, the swollen key. All I am  
beats down on you, hard as threshers'  
hands and meek as rain, my whole  
science to reveal you, conceal you  
your comings and goings trapped in this shell.

10 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

---

Enough said  
like the man  
said

as  
not like  
woman  
not man

Why say  
a thing  
at all  
let alone  
enough

if not to you?

11 June 2002  
Cuttyhunk

## ON THE MARGIN OF SILENCE

The window I look out  
is full of thinking  
not much of it mine

you can be quiet now  
I thought to myself  
grammar  
won't get there today

tomorrow maybe  
it's like a party  
remember everybody  
goes home unsatisfied  
irritated ashamed

but today the cold  
air moves slow  
the sun is warm  
ornery as rain

sometimes it is humiliating  
to be so forgiven  
by language  
when so much of what  
I want to be or do or take  
can wrap itself  
leaf-tight in a word

the frost-killed rosebud

of somebody's name,

why is the sense

we make always

the opposite of senses.

11 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

TIMBRE

A buffalo  
between me and sunset  
stuck on a card  
gets it there  
despite the morbid imagery  
an animal we exterminated  
on a prairie we stole

what do the words  
written beside it do  
not just the USA 21  
but the ones I put there  
under such auspices  
I love you I wish you

with me here  
where we had never  
done it never  
lifted viking fists  
against a sleeping world

and the sun is going  
down only on us  
the buffalo is dead

This kind of postage stamp  
doesn't have to be licked  
this kind of language  
doesn't know how to apologize

11 June 2002 Cuttyhunk





---

will I ever get  
enough of you  
I try to think  
about what enough  
might mean

can come up  
with nothing  
no limit  
to this need

as if having  
most of you is  
still having nothing at all.

11 June 2002  
Boston

## LA CHAIR DE LUNE

Swells plump with us  
But not tonight  
Tonight I look up at you  
From way down her  
Like a kid on the floor  
Staring up his sister

Moon you are not  
My mother not my wife  
Not even my daughter  
I don't know who you are

Did you come to me  
About the water  
How to slosh it up and down  
Day after day the tide

The tedious game you play  
With me? Don't tell me  
You play it with others  
Too, how could they stand it,

A Mass that never ends  
A class that never lets out  
Air full of birds  
And none of them are you

Where does your flesh  
Come from sweet moon  
Who are nobody?  
When does the skin of light

Come to touch me?

11 June 2002

Cuttyhunk

---

walking there and why would I be  
after those long sonatas of Pandolfi  
had carved the world into meaning

and a word could be. think  
how long a word in being born,  
three ages in labor in a hot month  
with wind screaming like eagles  
the word was born

the question asks itself  
were we born before or after it.  
This is the only question  
of which the world is actually made.

Everything else is just geometry.

11 June 2002

Boston

---

white miracles in little trucks Good  
Humor vexing the evening air  
with over and over again  
the same what kind of melody  
it drives you crazy you want to eat it

because you were young once inside the piece of wood  
split the fire and water's there  
and I am water. I am the stupid god who started all this  
  
a word and a word and then this.

11 June 2002  
Boston

- - - - -

The internet. The internet comes back to remind us of morality. It even teaches morality up to a point\*. Because it works in a binary manner.

At any moment you can click on the button or not click. There is always a yes or no choice in front of you.

Ditto in life. However your choices are motivated, initiated, even compelled by the whole weight of your background and the socio-economic grid, you still at any single moment can do something or refrain from doing it. That is binary. This is liberty. It may be the only liberty you ever have. It is at that moment you take your existential stand, stake your life, make your wager.

To choose to do this, or choose not to do it. Or, if the somber dialectic has its way, you only think you choose, the choice is dictated by the conjuncture — even so, the sense of choosing, the sense of saying yes or no, is the sensation of freedom.

The sensation of being free. Is that materially different from freedom? Is it how we choose, or how we feel about what we choose, that makes us actually free? There are spins in both directions, and I don't know the answer.

I do know it is bracing, exciting, frightening, demanding, to stand at the moment of choosing. To click the button. Or not.

12 June 2002, Boston

---

\* It will actually teach morality when we get rid of the BACK button. There is no reversing in a moral universe.





## BEING HOME

Being  
And being home  
And what being there  
Means when it is here

Here is other  
And other wise  
The wisdom of being  
And being quiet

No the wisdom  
Of being and being  
Something else  
Even somebody else

Somebody else's body even  
Eve or Else  
Or anybody even

13 June 2002

...

---

To be at peace  
the way the ceiling is  
old plaster  
mildly slowly flaking

but nothing falls today,  
to be at peace like an old  
sea chart, portolan  
showing the way

to nowhere you know,  
just here  
quiet as the ceiling is  
dry plaster remembering

quiet, to cling  
to the surface of life  
and be your own color  
as long as you can,

this is what it teaches  
to be anywhere.

13 June 2002

---

Siegmund is dead

Siegmund not Siegfried  
the young intender the lover  
not the one fooled by the merest  
mime not the one bamboozled  
by a hedge of fire  
no, the young one  
killed by the spear  
of someone else's  
interpretation.

I heard his death  
and I heard Jon Vickers singing Troilus,  
James King singing Apollo's  
*Every sacred morning*

but some mornings  
you wake up and have to die

13 June 2002

## SHELLS FROM FLORIDA

nautilus triton ark shell auger shell surf clam giant clam  
abalone helmet shell scallop tellin cowrie moon shell  
tulip top shell Venus clam pearl oyster periwinkle whelk sundial  
cone shell murex penshell turban  
limpet conch cockle shell mussel lucine cone shell jackknife clam

1.

Some of these I know my own  
some of the shapes attend me  
waiting for the sea to fill them

fill the names with sand  
fill the names with salt  
fill the salt with \_\_\_\_\_

some of the salt names me.  
Some of the names shape me.

I know my own. I know my shell.  
My shell attends me  
A pen shell writes with murex ink  
A letter to the sundial:  
Stop talking.

2.

Capital V for Venus. No capital  
J for jack. Somepeople are lucky.

Some people are god.

God knows His own. A pen  
Knows the word up its sleeve.  
The murex dies painfully  
(every death is painful)  
to write my latest trash.

Fill what I say with what I mean.  
Be my Venus. Be my clam.  
Let me be the pearl in your mussel.  
Do they come that way.

Does anything happen when the shells jingle?  
Noise in your pocket.  
Does anything happen when it sings?

Listen carefully the shell doesn't change its tune.

3.

Cowries change hands.  
Money talks.  
Shells change hands.

What changes your hands?

4.

Poetperson, are you not a stevedore of unlikely commodities?  
Do the things your hands carry from ink to paper change your hands?

What do you haul up the gangplank of that strange craft  
(you even dare to call it) you ply the Seas of Absence with?  
Where do you take it? Does it change them there  
Where it happens on land? Does it change you to go there?

Shells were used for currency. Currency means running  
from hand to hand, afraid to stop — picture a hollow shell  
locked in a drawer, listening to the sea by itself,

a nasty picture. Be chaste if you must but remember.

14 June 2002

## A HISTORY OF COFFEE *in ten chapters*

1. It began to live in Africa. In the mountains of the Harrar, in what the Greeks called the land of the Aethiops, north of the great valley where Mother Eve lived, and summoned out of *adamah*, the ground, her adoring male consort, father of the human race.

2. The first of us who used coffee used more from the tree than we do. From the leaves, dried and sometimes fermented, they made tea, a to drink with the rest of what the tree offered: the coffee berries, bright red outside to begin with, pale brown when dried, roasted a little then ground into a paste and sweetened with honey: something like our peanut butter. They wrapped the paste in leaves and ate it on their journeys, like pemmican, full of roughage and calories and oils; they drank the tea made from the coffee leaves. The tea, incidentally, contains more caffeine than our coffee does.

3. The Greek gods were the first outside of Africa to know about it. Actually, many of the gods had come from Africa in the first place, and remembered their native food.

4. In Homer we hear about coffee several times. The gods go off to Aethiopia for a feast. This is really a coffee party (*kaffeeeklatsch*, in the demotic). That is where the gods always go for a holiday from Olympus. And that is why they go.

5. Coffee, chariot of the Angel Caffeine, was the only effective chemical stimulant known to the ancient Mediterranean world.

6. Later, when the Romans shifted their attention to Northwest Africa, the secret of coffee was lost; this loss ultimately resulted in an extremely sleepy, constipated people called the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire followed by the Dark Ages. The Dark Ages ended when the Rise of Islam occasioned the cessation of beer and wine drinking in the Near East, and its replacement by coffee, propagated from the African hearth to southern Arabia and the Yemen. The extremely stimulated Arab tribes woke the world up with their jangling nerves, the clatter of their armies.

7. But back to Homer. The main Homeric citation of coffee is in the mysterious (but only to classical scholars) drug *molu*, given to Odysseus by the gods to help him resist the torpid sorceries of Circe. Resist by watchfulness, alertness. *Molu* is described as first black, then white. Can we intuit what Odysseus was actually given? (Hint: no pigs drink coffee.)

8. But back to the Arabs. The Age of the Enlightenment as it is called in Europe began with the defeat of the invading Moslem armies at Vienna in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Ottoman fled back into nearby Balkan mountains which he would continue to rule for hundreds of years, leaving the great European plain (puszta, steppe, prairie) to the Catholics and Protestants. But the Turks also left behind them the practice of coffee. Coffee spread from Vienna throughout the Judeo-Christian world forever. Biber. Bach. Mozart. Beethoven.

9. And Balzac. Coffee is the juice of music, muses, poets, novelists — all those *who make or tell the thing that is not*. Coffee is the chemical from which lies are brewed, those curious lies that turn into truth.

10. The world, Wittgenstein observed, is whatever is the case. Coffee, on the other hand, is on the other hand. Coffee is whatever is not the case. Yet.

14 June 2002